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August 11, 1953

MEMORANDUM FOR: Director of Central Intelligence

SUBJECT : Proposal for establishment of food depots along zonal boundaries

1. The Working Committee of the PSB prepared a draft reply to the Soviet note of July 11, 1953, in which it was proposed that the United States set up depots along the interzonal boundary at which East Germans could pick up food packages. This draft was not used because of the objections of Ambassador Bohlen. The State Department then proposed to U. S. High Commissioner Conant on 10 August that the offer to establish food depots be incorporated in a note to Soviet High Commissioner Semenov and that if this offer were rejected "as we presume it would be . . . scattered food depots [would be established] 7 along the frontiers to which East Germans would be invited to come and collect packages". The U. S. High Commissioner has not yet commented on this proposal.

2. It is our understanding that, at the PSB meeting on 12 August, the State Department will propose that action be taken to set up the food depots immediately, unless Mr. Conant in the meanwhile expresses very strong opposition. EE Division feels that a favorable decision on this proposal would be contrary to the best interests of the United States. If the proposal were carried out, it would evoke not only the usual Communist denunciations but also lend further substance to the statements of some West Europeans that we are using food as cold war propaganda. We will thus dissipate much of the good will which we have acquired since June 16. Furthermore, as the interzonal borders are much more difficult to cross than the Berlin Sector boundaries, we incur the risk of Soviet countermoves resulting in bloodshed or repressive measures against the Soviet Zone population. The Russians would thus be provided with a pretext for sealing the Sector border as well as the Zonal boundary. This would, of course, greatly hamper our operations both in Berlin and East Germany.

3. While the need for food does exist, it is not so great that an East Zone citizen would put his life in jeopardy to obtain a five pound package. Those who did attempt to cross the boundary would do so in the conviction that they were somehow being protected by us. They would not believe that we would invite them to cross the sterilized belt between the zones unless we were ready to accept full responsibility for their action. The Soviets, aware that we were not prepared to accept such responsibility, could turn this situation into a politico-psychological victory. We would be accused, and stand convicted, of irresponsibility -- particularly if any violence or bloodshed should result from our invitation.

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Unless we are prepared to offer protection and possibly asylum to the East Germans who accept the offer, our position vis-a-vis the Soviet Control Forces in East Germany, would be drastically weakened.

4. Although U. S. High Commissioner Conant has not yet commented on this proposal, he has indicated that he is opposed to unilateral action which this in all probability would be. An instruction to Mr. Conant to implement the food depot proposal without French and British approval will put relations within the Allied High Commission under great strain at the very time when Three-Power unity is essential for the success of the forth-coming conference with the USSR. Furthermore, the Soviets would be provided with an opportunity to exploit a fundamental difference between the United States and its Allies, a difference which would be apparent from the fact that there would, in all probability, be no food depots along the British zonal boundary.

5. EE Division recommends that instead of carrying out proposal for establishment of food depots along the zonal boundary, the PSB consider supplementing the present food distribution with distribution of clothing, as suggested by Chancellor Adenauer. This would permit tapering off the food program after the fall harvest and give us an opportunity for a new approach, and renewed impetus, in our campaign in Germany.

[Redacted]
John A. Gross
Chief
EASTERN EUROPE DIVISION

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